

Being There by lilaestheticsnhope

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Summary:

The queen of Hawkins High is the cheer captain, an avid softball player, and surrogate mom to six middle schoolers and her best friend Steve Harrington. When Billy decides to mess with her he bites off way more than he can chew.

1. Chapter 1

“I just don’t like the way he looks at you,” Steve complained as he leaned against the locker beside his best friend’s. She slammed the locker door closed, blowing a bubble with her bright pink bubble gum, and giving him a look he knew well. It was the “you’re an idiot, Steve Harrington” look. She didn’t even have to say it for him to hear the exact cadence of her voice. The bubble popped and she turned around to head towards the cafeteria.

“Well,” she began, after she collected the bubblegum on her mouth with her tongue, “I’ll curb check his ass, so it’s in his best interest to stop looking.”

Steve smiled at that. He wouldn’t say so, for fear of mortal peril, but when Billy showed up at Hawkins High he was worried she’d fall for him. Y/N used to have a thing for bad boys, or more specifically assholes, but he guessed she had changed quite a bit over the years. It had been awhile since she dated anyone. Her last relationship was ugly, and it made her a bit of a badass, if not a little scary. It was one of those situations where you either get tough, or get killed. It had changed the way people at school perceived her. If Steve was the King of Hawkins High, then Y/N was the queen.

“Vicky! I love that top, girl!” she called out as she passed a group of girls, a genuine smile on her face. Unlike Steve, Y/N didn’t become high school royalty by picking on people. She did it by being kind, and generally approachable. It was her take-no-shit attitude that separated her from other girls in school. People who tried to give her shit usually wound up in a ditch passed out somewhere.

“Vicky is so pretty,” she murmured lightly, “if Danny fucks her over I’m gonna cut his fucking balls off. She’s a nice girl.” She said the second part in the same light tone. Steve huffed a short laugh.

“I’ll send the message.”

“Do that. Now tell me, how ya holding up?”

“Y/N, it’s been months,” Steve sighed, throwing his head back in

exhaustion.

“Hey, don’t give me that shit, Harrington. Broken hearts suck and you didn’t deserve that. Since you won’t let me channel my worry into aggression-”

“No don’t do that!”

“I’m not! But that means I just gotta worry, and all that worry falls to you, my friend,” she turned to grin up at him. He looked down at her, way down. She was short. You’d think that would take away from her bad girl persona, but somehow it just added to it. What she lacked in size, she made up for in personality... and hair. She had amazing hair.

Steve rolled his eyes at her sentiment, and she reached up and squished his cheeks with her hand.

“Come on, who loves you?” she cooed, making kissy faces at him.

He pushed her hand away, “Stop it, jeez,” he tried to make a show of being upset but he couldn’t hide the smile on his face.

“Who loves you?”

“You,” he sighed.

“That’s right. We’re best friends Stevie. I’ve got your back. I’d fucking kill for you, you hear me? One word, that’s all it would take,” she looked up at him intensely, making Steve laugh again. Y/N liked Nancy. She loved Steve, though. He was her best friend since, well, forever. When he turned up at her house drunk, and emotional because Nancy told him it was all “bullshit”, the only thing that stopped her from hunting down Nancy that very moment was how distraught and emotional Steve was. By morning, when he was sober, he convinced her not to go inflict bodily harm on the Wheeler girl, not that she would have. She liked Nancy, she would have scared her a little, told her off for treating Steve the way she did, nothing more.

“You’re such a weirdo. No wonder the kids love you so much.”

“Those kids are hardcore. Of course they love me.”

They walked into the cafeteria side by side. Since Steve wasn't friends with Tommy and Carol anymore the two of them sat at a different table with Y/N's friends. They were good people, a little rough around the edges, but soft on the inside. They reminded Steve of Y/N herself. He'd read somewhere that people surround themselves with people they can identify with the most. Y/N's friends were clear proof of that. She sat down, straddling the bench instead of sitting correctly.

"So when are you gonna let me teach you how to actually fight, Harrington. You can't keep getting your ass kicked by Billy. I can't stand for that. I mean I'd fight him, but I wouldn't want to bruise your ego."

"No one is fighting anyone. Especially not you."

"No promises. If he puts his hands on my fucking kids again, he's dead. Do you hear me? Dead. I'll cut him up into little pieces, and he'll only ever be a missing person," she threaten jabbing a perfectly manicured finger at Steve. Despite the tough girl personality she maintained, Y/N was a girly-girl. She liked make-up, high heels, and things that were frilly and pink. She also just happened to be a black belt in karate. She was also cheer captain, which made her surprisingly strong. Fuck the stereotype about the weak cheerleader, Y/N could beat Steve at an arm wrestling match without even trying that hard.

"Your kids?" Steve question, amused by her phrasing. That was another thing, as tough as she was, she didn't ever hide her feelings. She told people when she loved them, and she showed them regardless as to who was around. She was protective of the kids the moment Dustin pulled her into looking for his lost "pet", Dart. Steve was sure she blamed herself for not seeing the whole thing through. When he told her what happened with Billy, he had to pick her up and hold her to keep her from driving off to go kick his unconscious ass.

"Yeah! They're your kids too. That doesn't make you want to commit murder?! Those are our kids!" she yelled, suddenly fired up like the incident just happened yesterday.

“We’re not their parents.”

“So?” she rose an eyebrow.

“So, maybe calm down?”

“I’ll calm down when I’m dead, Harrington. I hate bullies,” she said emphatically. That was a change the years made on her. One bad boyfriend was all it took. Steve just nodded then gestured towards the lines for food. She nodded standing up and going with him actually get food. As they stood in line, Y/N took to fussing over Steve.

“Are you eating? You’re looking thin.”

“I’m-”

“Come to my house after school. I’ll make dinner. Mom’s been asking about you too. She’ll be home late, but she’d be happy to see you.”

“You’re dad?”

“Tokyo,” she shrugged. Her mom was often home but her father never was.

“I’ll come over.”

She beamed up at him and reached up to squish his cheeks again, “Come on say cupcake.”

“Cupcake,” his voice was marred by the pressure on his cheeks. She laughed letting him go and letting her head fall back.

“Look at that smile,” the last person either of them wanted to hear spoke, “I’ve heard you’re hot shit around here, sweetheart.”

“My name’s not sweetheart, it’s Ms. L/N since ya nasty,” Y/n quipped back at him. She didn’t even avert her gaze from Steve while she did it. She seemed cool as cucumber, but Steve saw the way her eyes hardened at the sound of Billy Hargrove’s voice.

“Fiery, I like that.” Billy grinned, coming to stand next to her. He was

so close she could feel his body heat, her smiley facade began to crack. She crinkled her nose, a habit she had when she was angry. Steve always thought it was adorable, as long as it wasn't aimed at him.

"Hargrove, let me go ahead and tell you a few things about myself," she whirled around to glare at him. She spoke in a low tone. It was calm, like the way things go still just before a tornado.

"I don't like you. In fact, the only mounting happening between me and you will be when I mount your fucking head above my fireplace. I am not your baby, your sweetheart, your anything. You will address me by name, in fact you won't address me at all. You won't even breathe my air. You will just turn around and scuttle away."

She picked up a tray and went around him in line. Steve watched her ask the lunch lady for the soup. Y/N never got the soup. She spilled it on herself once freshman year and burned her thighs. From then on she wouldn't touch the school soup. Steve knew that, so he just watched her confusedly as he tried to put himself between her and Billy. Billy shoved past him though, coming to stand right beside her.

"I'm not usually into people like you, but there's something about you, Ms. L/N."

"People like me?" she questioned, furrowing her brow. The nose wrinkle was more pronounced. Steve looked around for a teacher, someone who would come help them when this got ugly, and it would if Hargrove didn't back off.

"Yeah you know, your kind," Billy gestured to another person of the same complexion as Y/N.

"Oh! Black people. You just get better and better don't you, Hargrove. Do yourself a favor and stop now," she scoffed. Billy reached out to grab her arm, but in one lightning fast movement she was out of his reach, glaring up at him with a face crumpled in pure rage and disgust. Steve stepped forward, realizing this might be one of those situations where he would have to physically carry her away from a fight.

“You listen here you cocky, white, bastard. You touch me again and it’ll be the last thing you ever do,” she pointed her finger at him and there was a type of rage on her face that Steve had only seen a handful of times. It made his heart drop to the soles of his feet.

“Billy, just leave her alone. She’s not interested,” Steve intervened, stepping between them. Y/N was tough, scary, stuff, but Billy was a whole head taller than her and strong- Steve learned that first hand- he wasn’t sure if Y/N could take him.

“Harrington, why are you always in my way,” Billy punctuated his sentence by shoving Steve out of the way.

“Oh I’m gonna stick my foot so far up your ass-” Y/N began taking a step towards Billy.

“Hey!” Steve yelled, grabbing her waist, and holding her back, “he’s just trying to get a rise out of you. Let’s just go,” Steve bent down and murmured to her. She looked at him, judging his expression, judging whether or not to listen to him.

“Fine, this manicure cost more than his life anyway,” she growled, stepping back and straightening her clothes. Steve let out a breath he didn’t realize he was holding. He turned too to walk away.

“Fancy girl, huh?” Billy continued as he followed them. Steve watched Y/N’s hands grip her tray harder.

“Hey, hey, Bubbz,” Steve spoke softly to her. It was a nickname her mother called her, short for Bubbly. Only her family called her Bubbz, it had a way of calming her down even through her worst fits of rage. At hearing the name she took a deep breath. They made it out of the line, they were headed back to their table when Billy grabbed her shoulder. He yanked her around to face him and she tossed hot soup in his face. Steve understood all at once why she got soup. Billy yelled out in pain and Y/N just watched him, a tense calculating expression on her face.

“Whoops, you made me spill my soup,” she growled, glaring at him. Steve’s jaw was on the floor looking between Y/N and Billy. Billy’s face was red, burning, and possessed with an anger Steve was very

familiar with. Y/N looked ready for anything. After a second, she passed the tray to Steve, took off her jacket and her earrings as she spoke again.

“You should go clean yourself up,” she suggested, still watching him like a lioness watches its prey through the tall grasses. Steve understood what she was doing. She’d made it look like an accident. She “swung” first, but she made it look like an accident so when she inevitably wound up in the principal’s office she would have deniability. Billy had a choice he could walk away now, or he could throw the next punch. If he did, then Y/N would be completely justified in protecting herself. Steve realized he forgot one thing about Y/N in his worry over this situation. Billy was bigger, and stronger, but Y/N was *smarter* .

“You’re gonna wish you didn’t do that.”

“I didn’t do anything. I didn’t mean to spill my soup,” she said calmly.

Billy stalked towards her and Steve made to step between them, but Y/N shoved him hard out of the way. She deliberately let Billy hit her- a hard slap with the back of his hand- then grabbed the lunch tray out of Steve’s hands and shoved it into his throat as hard enough to make him choke but not hard enough to break his trachea. Billy doubled over, choking on his own Adam’s apple. The entire cafeteria was silent.

“Don’t. Touch. Me!” she growled. He was too busy choking to retaliate. Y/N took this as her cue to leave. She grabbed her jacket from Steve, and began walking away. She pulled her compact from the pocket. Steve looked at her incredulously as she seemed to be touching up her make-up. Despite his incredulity he followed after her.

“Y/N! Where are you going?” he hissed at her.

“I need a minute,” her voice was trembling, but she kept looking at the mirror. Behind them teachers were descending upon Billy, but he was trudging towards her, red faced and looking like a man on a mission.

“Get back here you fucking, bitch.” He coughed between his words, throat still reacting to the blow.

Steve watched Y/N duck and a bowl go flying over her head. He understood that she wasn’t fixing her makeup she was watching Billy.

“Walk away, Billy,” Steve warned, reminded once again that his best friend was not a woman to be reckoned with. He still came trudging after her.

“Let him come,” she spoke in the calmest voice Steve ever heard her use. He was stunned into inaction. Billy grabbed her hair and yanked her against him.

“Someone’s gotta teach you some manners, pretty girl,” he growled in her ear. She jumped up, ramming the top of her skull into his chin, making him bite into his lip. When he still didn’t let go of her hair she rammed her elbow hard enough into his ribcage to hear a crack. He finally let go, doubling over and falling to the ground in pain. Before he could get up, and just before teachers could leave their classrooms to do anything she bent down to be eye level with him.

“I won’t kill you, Billy, but if you ever touch me again, I won’t just break your ribs,” she glanced away from him to see a door opening, so she let him backhand her once more. It hadn’t hurt half as much as she made it sound like it did. The teacher ran out and grabbed Billy by the collar.

Steve knew this game. He bent down to grab Y/N in a hug to solidify her status as the terrified victim as she cried crocodile tears. The gym teacher soon joined the scene pulling Billy up to his feet, irritating his freshly broken ribs.

“Harrington, what the hell happened here?” The coach demanded.

“He attacked Y/N,” Steve explained while Y/N continued sobbing in his arms.

Y/N’s favorite English teacher came over and spoke softly to Y/N, “Come on sweetie, let’s get you to the office. Steve you should get to class.”

"No, I don't want to be alone," she whined looking up at the woman pitifully. The thing about Y/N being so small is that people wanted to protect her.

"Okay, okay, come on Steve help me get her to the office."

Steve picked her up and she let him carry her to the office just for show. The student body would know what really happened, but as far as the administration was concerned, it was all just one big misunderstanding that had scared poor sweet Y/N and given her a very unsightly bruise.

As expected, Y/N got sent home early for her injuries and given the option to press charges. Billy was suspended. Hopper came down from the station for her protection. There was a brief moment in which she and Billy passed each other in the office as they all walked out.

"You're fucking dead, Y/N!" he growled. She made a show of cowering behind Hopper.

"Hey, kid! I could arrest you right now, that was a threat on her life," Hopper yelled back, tucking Y/N further behind him. He turned to look away from Billy to comfort Y/N.

"Come on, we're gonna get you home," he assured. She nodded feebly, sniffing and carrying on. Despite the fact that Steve knew this was all just an act, he still felt acutely distressed at seeing her so upset. However the moment they were all outside, Hopper let her go.

"Alright, you can stop now," he sighed letting go of Y/N. He knew Y/N was tough as nails. He'd seen her in action the last time shit went down in Hawkins, but he also knew Billy was a grade A asshole and that Y/N would never start a fight- she just finished them.

"Thanks, Hop," she went over and wiped her face with Steve's shirt.

"Oh come on!" Steve complained.

"Shut up," she scoffed.

"Steve, take your girlfriend home. I'll go by that kid's house, keep

him away from you two.”

“She’s not-”

“Don’t care!” Hopper trudged off to his truck, “Y/N are you still good to babysit tonight?”

“Of course, wouldn’t miss it for the world!” she called back as she linked arms with Steve and began walking towards his car. He opened the passenger side door for her and she got in. Steve’s car smelled like him, which was a unique mixture of Ralph Lauren cologne, hairspray, and a hint of nicotine. It was here in the familiar place of Steve’s car that she had her real break down. Her hands were shaking and she balled them in fists as she let her head fall back against the headrest. Tears rolled from her eyes again, but there were no dramatic wails and sobs. There was just erratic breathing and tremors.

“Let’s go to my house” she whispered before he could start trying to comfort her. He nodded, starting up the car, then doing as she asked. She was silent as they drove, but only for a couple of moments.

“I hate doing that,” she whispered, “it’s like reliving it you know.”

It was half a year with a guy who hit her all the time. Steve didn’t even know it was happening until they were all at a party together. Y/N was drinking more than normal that night and Steve was trying to get her to slow down. He yelled at her and she started crying.

“Please don’t Steve, not you too.” Steve was, understandably confused. He pulled her into the bathroom of the party where she told him between sobs that her boyfriend was hitting her, that all of her bruises weren’t from cheerleading- a lie she often told Steve- but from him. It was another few months when she had to fight for her life that she broke up with him. She wound up on Steve’s doorstep, face bloodied, crying, and shaking.

“Yeah, I know.”

“But I’d rather relive it in my head then let someone like Billy just do what he wants to me. I’ll die before anyone ever does that to me

again,” she vowed with a severity that always scared Steve.

“Hey, don’t talk like that. You won’t have to worry about anything because you have me,” he vowed, looking at the road ahead of him, but when Y/N didn’t respond immediately he glanced over at her. She was giving him a soft smile, it was different than her big grins, this was filled with a love cultivated over 17 years. She took his hand where it rested on the gear shift between them.

“Thanks, Steve.” Her face was beginning to bruise but she still looked as beautiful as she always did to Steve. He looked back at the road, but lifted her hand to his mouth and kissed it.

“What are you thanking me for? You did all the work,” he smiled.

“Just... for being there.”

2. #1 Mom

“How’s school been,” Y/N looked over at the girl in the passenger seat of her car. Hopper’s schedule was always full, but he didn’t want Jane to be alone in the house all the time so he chose Y/N to babysit her after school. Y/N agreed because it was good money, and after the events of last halloween, she was rather fond of Jane.

“Good,” Jane answered, giving an earnest smile to Y/N.

“Whaddya wanna do tonight? You got homework?”

“Yes,” she frowned thinking of the work in her backpack.

“I could help you if you want, and we could have a nice dinner, bake some cookies.”

“Really?” Jane asked and Y/N looked over at her confusedly, wondering why she was so surprised.

“Of course, kiddo,” she reached over and ruffled Jane’s hair playfully, “I’ll do your nails and your hair. We could have something of a sleepover. Hopper’s gonna be out late and he wants you to just stay with me.”

“Max.”

“Yeah, Max can come if she wants.”

“Max!”

Y/N looked to Jane to see that she was all but leaning in the backseat looking behind them. Y/N looked too to see Max walking on the left side of the road. Y/N hit the brakes then U-turned to catch up with her. The girl looked at the car warily until the window rolled down and she saw Y/N’s familiar face.

“Where ya headed, kiddo?” Y/n asked, her brow crumpled in worry. Max lifted her head and looked down the road, back in the direction of her house.

“Anywhere but home.”

“Come on, Jane and I are planning a sleepover. You can join in. Get in the car,” Y/N leaned into the backseat and unlocked the door. Max got in the car. She wouldn’t admit it but she was terrified walking along the road like she was. She was afraid Billy would come by in his car and mow her down. Max relaxed against the backseat, feeling the most secure she’d felt in longer than she could remember. Y/N was the only person to win a fight with Billy, and it was obvious he was at least a little afraid of her. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be so hung up on her.

“Max, you know, you can call me whenever. I don’t care what time it is. If you need help you call me, or Steve and we’ll come get you. And if you can make it to my house then you’re always welcome too, okay?”

“Okay,” she answered.

“Boyfriend?” Jane asked suddenly.

“What?”

“Is Steve?”

“Oh, no,” Y/N laughed a little, “we’re just friends, best friends.”

Jane looked confused but she nodded anyway. At Y/N’s house, the girls made themselves at home. There was no one but them there which was usual. While Y/N’s mom was loving, but she was busy, and her father was just busy. The girls chatted while Y/N called Max’s mom to tell her where Max was so they wouldn’t send Billy after her.

“Hi, Mrs Mayfield, this is Y/N L/N. I picked Max up to hang out with Jane and I. Were just gonna work on some homework, then maybe paint each other’s nails, you know just girl time. I was being sure that was okay.”

“Oh of course. I’ve been worried that Max wasn’t making friends.”

“Do you mind if she sleeps over. Jane’s staying and it’s just us girls, I

promise. I just think they could use some time..."

"That sounds wonderful. Do I need to pick her up in the morning?"

"No, don't bother yourself, Mrs. Mayfield. I'll drop her off. You have a beautiful evening."

"The same to you."

Y/N said her goodbyes then hung up the phone, "Alright, Max, you're clear to stay!" she called.

"Thanks, Y/N!" Max bounded into the kitchen with Y/N, "Do you think we could call everyone else over?"

"I just told your mom only girls were over."

"It's not like she's gonna check."

"Jane! Are you in on this?" Y/N asked, peering into the living room from the kitchen. Jane peeked from behind the couch.

"Please?" she implored, batting her big brown eyes. Y/N narrowed her eyes at her, trying to resist how cute she looked. She then looked over at Max who was pulling an equally adorable face in hopes of persuading their babysitter to give them what they wanted. Y/N might have been a hard-hitting, take-no-shit person with assholes like Billy, but with these kids, she was putty. She rolled her eyes and picked the phone back up to dial Steve's number. It ringed a couple of times before Steve answered.

"Hello?"

"Harrington, the girls are at my place, bring the boys over."

"How did you know?"

"Steve it's Tuesday they had AV Club. You always pick them up. Now bring the boys over."

"God, you're so damn pushy, alright," he grumbled.

“Don’t whine, Steve, it’s unbecoming.”

“Oh bite me.”

“I mean if you’re into that kind of thing, Harrington, I guess I can arrange that if you bring the boys over. Both Jane and Max are giving me puppydog eyes. I can’t take it.”

“You’re such a pushover. We’ll be there in ten,” he sighed then spoke away from the phone, “Hey dipshits, we’re headed to Y/N’s get your shit.”

“See you soon, buh bye,” she hung up with an exaggerated sigh before looking at Max, “are you happy?”

Max grinned and nodded before running back into the front room to talk to Jane again. Those two started off wary of each other, but now they were as thick as thieves. Y/N couldn’t help her smile as she shook her head. The girls put a tape in the stereo, their current favorite: Prince. Y/N danced around the kitchen as she took out ingredients to make dinner. The kids ate pizza all the time with Steve so they would benefit from a home cooked meal. The girls came in the kitchen with her and danced. She had them help with dinner as they shook their hips and danced around. When a slow song came on Y/N turned to Jane, using a spoon as a microphone, and sang emphatically to her. Jane grinned, eyes sparkling with amusement, and awe in equal measure. Y/N was secretly a gifted singer; three people knew that about her: Max, Jane, and Steve. She turned to Max to give her an equally heartfelt performance as the noodles boiled. Y/N decided on Chicken Fettuccine Alfredo for dinner. It was a way to trick the kids into eating their vegetables. If she dosed it all in alfredo sauce they’d be more likely to eat it.

The boys took much longer than ten minutes to get there, it was more like thirty. Y/N would glance at the kitchen clock every now and again and begin to worry. Steve didn’t even live ten minutes away from Steve. It was a three minute drive if that. She tried to quell her anxieties, thinking perhaps the boys were taking a while, or they went to do something else first. Focusing on dinner helped her keep a happy facade for the girls, but when dinner was finished, she found it harder not to fret.

“Y/N,” Jane called, taking Y/N’s hand.

“Yes?”

“Where’s Steve?” she asked, her brow creased with worry. Y/N’s heart rate picked up.

She made an effort to act as if this was the first time she’d even considered where the boys might be, “That’s a good question, cutie pie. I bet Steve’s just taking forever to do his hair,” she joked. Jane smiled, but she didn’t look at ease, it was as if she, too, feared the worst. Y/N wasn’t quite sure what “the worst” was. Was it Billy Hargrove? Had he shown up at Steve’s place looking for Max, or just looking for a fight? Or was it truly the *worst* and something else from the Upside-Down was threatening her boys.

“Let’s give them a call,” Y/N settled. She walked over to the kitchen phone, grabbed it off the hook, and dialed Steve’s number. The phone rang, and rang, but there was no answer. Instead she heard Mrs. Harrington’s cheery voice telling her to leave a message. Y/N frowned, hanging up, trying to think where Steve could be. Before her thought process could go very deep, her doorbell rang. She let out a sigh of relief.

“I’m gonna kick his ass for making me worry like that,” she growled as she ran to the door.

“Harrington, what the hell took so long?” she demanded as she opened the door, only as she looked up, it wasn’t Steve’s face she saw. It was Billy. She immediately went to close the door again, but Billy shoved it open. In order to prevent him from pushing it all the way open, she braced her foot behind the door. It bounced off the inside of her foot swinging to close again. Billy held the door open.

“Guess I’m not who you were expecting.”

“Hargrove, you wouldn’t want me to call Hopper would you?” Y/N asked raising an eyebrow. There was an aluminum bat just behind the door. She couldn’t reach it and keep the door where it was. Billy was still actively pushing at it, but Y/N had strong legs. He didn’t have a prayer of getting in without using excessive force. The bat was

a precaution for this exact situation.

“Just wondering if you knew where my brat of a little sister was. She looks up to you, figured she would have come here.”

“What would make her come here? What did you do?” Y/N’s expression hardened. Max never told her exactly why she was walking on the side of the road. Y/N reached for the bat, still trying to hold her ground, but she needed a weapon if she was going to fight Hargrove with no one else around to help. Her reaching was hopeless though. Her arms weren’t long enough.

“She just ran off. Wouldn’t want my stepmom to worry about her.”

“She won’t. I’ve already talked to Mrs. Mayfield. You can go,” Y/N dismissed curtly.

“So she is here?” he rose his eyebrows.

“You. Should. Go.” Y/N growled. Jane stood just out of sight, in the kitchen, peeking out to see Y/N reaching for her bat. She knew who was at the door. Max was hiding in a secret place in the house under Jane’s instruction. With a thought she made the bat slide into Y/N’s grasp. Y/N didn’t glance back to see Jane, though she knew she must have been behind the bat’s sudden movement.

“You think you’re hot shit just because of what happened at school. I was holding back then, princess.”

“So was I.”

“Listen! One way or another you’re gonna give me what I want-”

“Billy, you are going to get off my porch, get into your car, and drive back home, or you’re not gonna like what happens next,” Y/N cut him off, tightening her grip on the baseball bat. This wasn’t about his attraction to her anymore, this was a power struggle. He’d gone unchecked through the halls of Hawkins high before Y/N took him down a peg. He intended to take her down more than a couple pegs.

“No dice, princess,” he growled, he shoved the door, and Y/N let him. She moved her foot into a better position to allow her to swing

the bat with the most control The door flew open and hit the wall protector behind it. There Y/N stood like a major league batter who was going to hit the ball out of the park.

“Go home,” she growled back, baring her teeth at him. She looked just as ferocious as a mama bear protecting her cubs. Jane stood watching, deciding what she would do if Y/N wasn’t enough, if Billy didn’t back down. She couldn’t kill, she wouldn’t kill, but what if...

Billy hesitated in the doorway, fear flashing in his eyes for just a moment before he replaced it with a smug expression fitted with a smirk, “Fine. Maybe I’ll go revisit Harrington.”

Y/N swung the bat, stopping it right at his neck, “You touch Steve, or any of my kids there’s nothing on this planet that could stop me from hunting you down. I’d go to the end of the earth just to tear you apart. You think you’re so bad? You ain’t shit.”

He just grinned. They were still for another moment, before Billy grabbed the bat and tried to yank it from her. She let him pull her forward, as she lifted one foot to about crotch level. The force at which he pulled the bat was mirrored by the force at which her foot plowed into his crotch. He naturally let go of the bat and she swung and hit him in the leg. He yelled in agony, her only response was to kick him in the stomach. He fell on the ground of her porch. She kicked him in his bad rib, reawakening the barely healed wound.

“Get up! Get the fuck out of here! You fucking psycho! Just leave us alone!” she yelled holding the bat, ready for another swing. He grabbed her leg and threw her balance off. Her head struck the porch hard. He scrambled up her body. All the while she viciously kicked, scrambling away from him. He was stronger and made it up her body. He paused thinking he’d won. Y/N punched him in the throat then in the ribs.

“Just stop!” she screamed at him as she hooked an arm behind his thigh and around his knee to throw him off of her. With his injured rib, he couldn’t counterbalance himself, so it was easy to make him fall over. She stood back up, and grabbed the bat again.

“LEAVE!” she wailed bringing the bat down as hard as she could

down right by his head. The metallic thud of the bat on the wooden porch rang through the air and vibrated through her hands. After the shock of her actions wore off, Billy scrambled up and away from the house as fast as he could. She watched him hobble back to his car. She stood on the porch with the bat until he drove off. Once Y/N was sure he was gone she went back inside, locking the door behind her. Jane ran to her, tears ran down her cheeks. Y/N held her tightly, swaying from side to side to comfort the young girl.

“Hey, it’s alright. It’s all okay,” she murmured, cradling the back of Jane’s head.

“Bad man,” Jane cried.

“Don’t be scared,” Y/N whispered, “I won’t let anything happen to you.”

“Not me,” Jane moved back to look at Y/N, “You and Max.”

“We’re gonna be okay too,” Y/N assured, pressing her hands to Jane’s cheeks before kissing her forehead, “Where’s Max?”

“Hiding.”

“Max!” Y/n yelled, letting go of Jane, “it’s okay he’s gone!”

After a moment, she could hear Max bounding through the house. As she came into the front room, Y/N noticed the tears on her face. Y/N opened her arms and Max accepted the invitation for a hug.

“I’ve got you, it’s okay,” she murmured. Jane joined in on the hug too, and eventually they just sat in the middle of the living room together, holding each other. Dinner was long forgotten, as were the boys until the doorbell rang again. Y/N grabbed the bat, before opening the door. This time however, Steve stood there. His expression changed from vaguely annoyed to shocked as he saw Y/N wielding an aluminum baseball bat.

“Whoa! It’s me!” he yelled holding out his hands and taking a few steps back. Y/n sighed in relief dropping the bat and grabbing Steve in a hug.

“What the hell?” Dustin exclaimed. Y/N let go of Steve and ushered them all inside, locking the door after them. Max immediately ran to Lucas, and Jane to Mike. Y/N looked the boys over for injury, then hugged every one of them.

“What’s up with you?” Steve demanded. Y/N just shook her head, wiping a hand over her face, and revealing bruised and bloody knuckles.

“Hey! Bubbz, what happened?” Steve crooned, taking her hand gently to inspect it.

“Billy came by,” she sighed.

“What?” Steve lifted his gaze from her hand.

“I had to... had to beat him with a damn bat to get him to leave us alone. And he said he’d revisit you and I thought maybe he got to you first ‘cause- ‘cause you were late. I would have killed him, Steve. If he hurt you guys I would have-” she rambled manically until Steve pulled her against his chest.

“None of that, okay? We’re fine. The boys wanted to bring some snacks. We were just at the grocery store,” he explained, knowing she needed to know they were alright before she’d even allow him to look after her. Jane was recounting the story to Dustin, Mike, Will, and Lucas.

“Let me see your hands,” Steve coaxed. She gave him her hands. Her knuckles were all bruised, a few of them were even cut open from collisions with Billy’s teeth.

“Come on, let’s clean these up.”

“I think I hit my head too,” she murmured, reaching back to touch the tender spot at the back of her head where it hit the porch.

“I’ll give it a look.”

“You guys, there’s dinner on the stove,” she told the kids, as Steve led her back towards the bathroom. The kids went to the kitchen, curious about the food.

Steve sat her down on the edge of the tub while he grabbed the first aid kit from the medicine cabinet. He sat on the toilet, with the lid down, and began cleaning the open wounds.

“If your hands look like this, I can imagine what Billy looks like,” Steve joked lightly. Y/N laughed, but it was more or less just an excess of air blown out of her nose.

“Y/N, we gotta tell Hopper, you can get a restraining order or something.”

“That’ll make it worse for Max,” she shook her head, “What if, since Billy’s not allowed near me, then her parents decide Max can’t be around me either?”

“That’s not gonna happen and even if it did, she’d still have me.”

“Well yeah, but Steve you can’t fight Billy without backup and he knows that.”

“I can-”

“Steve, if he hurt you, I’d kill him,” she answered intensely, there was no hint of hyperbole in her tone. She meant what she said. Steve wasn’t quite sure how to respond. She was looking up at him the way people do in movies when they say something real intense, like I love you, before they go off to war. Only it wasn’t “I love you” it was a promise of murder.

“And then you’d go to jail,” Steve reminded, “and what the hell am I supposed to do without you, huh?” Steve pressed a hand to her cheek. She sighed an indicator that she got his point and would try not to go to jail.

“My mom’s a pretty good lawyer,” she offered, smiling meekly. Steve could only laugh, despite the seriousness of their conversation. She was still going to kill Billy, she was just assuring that she would and she’d get away with it.

“I can’t imagine anyone bothering you after getting beat with a baseball bat.”

"Well I couldn't imagine anyone bothering me after hot soup in the face, but here we are," she huffed.

"Talk to Hopper, get this on record," Steve said sternly, "If he messes with you again..."

"I'll kill him."

"He'll be arrested," Steve corrected.

"...Okay."

Steve went back to treating her hands. He'd sometimes sneak glances at her face to see how she was holding up. She was visibly shaken, sure, but she didn't seem like she'd fall apart. Every now and again the kids would laugh loudly and a ghost of a smile would reach her face. Steve thought of the conversation he and the boys had in the grocery store.

"Will, you gotta tell Y/N, she'll kick their asses," Dustin said emphatically to Will. He was getting picked on by older kids again.

"It's not that big of a deal," Will shook his head.

"Yeah, it is!" Lucas jumped into the conversation.

"Who's picking on you?" Steve asked.

"No one," Will insisted.

"Hey, I'll kick their ass," Steve vowed. The kids looked up at him for a moment, then continued their conversation.

"Tell Y/N," Mike urged, "remember when she saw those kids trying to trash our bikes. I thought they were gonna piss their pants when they saw her."

"Oh yeah, they were all like s-s-sorry. W-w-we didn't know," Lucas mocked laughing. Steve smiled shaking his head, remembering how she'd jumped out of his car, and stalked towards the boys. She was wearing heels that day, and still looked ready to kick some ass.

"I don't want her to scare anyone," Will shook his head, "I just want

people to stop treating me like I'm gonna break."

"Hey, man. Does Y/N ever treat you like that?" Steve asked, looking down at the kid.

He thought for a moment then shook his head.

"Talk to her. She's good for more than just kicking ass," Steve assured.

"You would know," Dustin punched Steve in the arm lightly, he frowned at the younger kid wondering what he was getting at.

"Yeah you're always staring at her like, Oh Y/N!" Lucas laughed, pressing the back of his hand to his forehead as if he were swooning.

"Oh fuck off, I don't talk about how you and Max just stare into each other's eyes," Steve threw back.

"You do it too!" Mike accused.

"I do not!" Steve snapped.

"Why don't you just ask her out?" Will asked. Steve looked at Will with a look that could only be described as betrayal. Will was usually on his side of these arguments, or at the very least he never joined in against him.

"She's my *friend*. We've known each other since we were in diapers."

"Will and I have known each other since we were in diapers and we don't stare longingly into each other's eyes," Mike scoffed.

"That's different," Steve rolled his eyes.

"You guys already act like our parents, you might as well be a couple," Lucas rolled his eyes.

The boys continued walking as Steve stopped, stunned into immobility that the kids could read him so well. No one else had a clue about the way he felt about Y/N. People made jokes, sure, but no one *actually* thought they'd ever date, or that either one of them

was interested in dating. Yet this group of middle school boys saw it so easily.

Looking at her, as she sat on the edge of the bathtub, he couldn't help but wonder what it would be like, if this was the moment where they kissed. He would tell her he loved her, and she wouldn't think it was because they were friends. She would know it was because he was in love. He wasn't sure he'd ever tell her though, because their friendship was good, really good. He could tell her absolutely anything, well anything but the fact that he was in love. That was their only secret.

"Mom," Jane called, she was suddenly in the doorway of the bathroom. Y/N looked at her confusedly.

"What?" Y/N and Steve asked simultaneously.

"Mike said you were mom," Jane explained to Y/N as she sat beside her on the tub.

"Oh I'm nobody's mom."

"Moms keep you safe, they love you, feed you, make you feel at home. You're my mom," Jane vowed, "I have two."

"Oh Jane," Y/N smiled, laughing quietly, "I do love you, and feed you, and you should feel at home with me, but please don't call me mom. I'm too young for that." Despite the fact that she was trying to make light of the situation, tears were welling up in Y/N's eyes. Jane kissed her cheek then went bounding off back to the kitchen.

"God dammit," Y/N sighed, "that got me right in my cold dead heart."

"You're a mom now. Congratulations. I'm offended I wasn't invited to the baby shower," Steve teased.

"Oh shut up, you dork. Come on, let's go have dinner."

3. What is Love?

She sat with Will cuddled up to her side while they watched a movie. Joyce was doing overtime at the store and Jonathan was out with Nancy, so Will called Y/N in hopes that he could hang out with her. He knew that his mom was just worried about something else awful happening to him. If he had to choose someone to be with it would be Y/N. She just treated him like any other person. When he fell down she didn't come running to swaddle him in bubble wrap. She helped him up, brushed the dirt off his knees and sent him back out without all the extra fretting. He also liked that she let him listen to her tapes. Y/N had everything, even the stuff Jonathan had, plus the things that played in the car with Steve, then music he'd never heard before. On Sunday mornings she'd turn on Marvin Gaye and sing in the kitchen. Will would always pretend to be asleep for longer just so he could listen to her.

He wasn't paying attention to the movie, he was thinking about how Steve looked at Y/N, and if he'd ever look at someone like that, or if anyone would ever look at him that way. He also wondered if he would be unfortunate enough to be oblivious to the fact that his love interest loved him back. Will might have been confused about who to love, and how to do it, but he knew love when he saw it. His friends, save Jane, couldn't even tell that Y/N loved Steve too. Y/N wasn't as obvious as Steve. It was in the little things, the way she worried over him no matter what. Just last week she was yelling at him about proper nutrition.

"You can't just order pizza every time the boys come over. You guys need fruits and vegetables."

"There's vegetables in pizza."

Y/N gave him a deadpanned expression, "Really? Tomato sauce doesn't count, you ass."

"Well I can't cook."

"You should learn," she laughed lightly, "I'll come over and teach you. You've gotta take care of yourself now, or when you get older

you're gonna have a pot-belly. Imagine it, Steve Harrington with a big ol' belly."

"Okay, stop it."

"I'm just saying. You have to take care of yourself."

Will couldn't help think it was kind of obvious. Sure they were friends, and friends worry over each other's health, but Y/N always kept Steve's future in mind. She was also fiercely protective. Will kind of felt sorry for anyone on her bad side. He remembered last week when Steve picked him and his friends up from AV Club. The week before, Y/N sent Billy running after she beat him with a baseball bat. Will guessed since he couldn't scare Y/N he set about going after Steve and the kids. He stopped Will as he was going over to the high school parking lot to meet Y/N. Billy grabbed him by his shirt collar.

"Zombie boy, right?" he smirked.

"Leave me alone," Will grumbled.

"I couldn't hear you," Billy yanked him closer, "you little queer."

"Billy," her voice felt like a gospel, like he was saved not only from Billy but from everything, "you seem to like getting your ass kicked."

Billy let Will go with a little shove, and turned around. With Billy out of the way, he could see Y/N standing there in her softball uniform, her bat resting on her shoulder, and her free hand on her hip. She blew a big bubble of her bright pink gum. The only sound between them for a moment was the sound of the bubble popping.

"Get outta here, Hargrove," she glared at him as if he were a bug, nothing more than a tiny, insignificant nuisance, "I'd hate to make another trip to talk to your parents."

Will realized that it wasn't just fighting that made Y/N practically untouchable, if that were the case she'd likely be in jail. Y/N was smart. She played the system to get what she wanted. After Billy showed up at her house, she went to Hopper and told him about the situation. Chief Hopper set up something of an intervention where Y/

N's parents, and Y/N with Billy's father and Billy. She sat and cried, spouted bull shit about how she didn't want to press charges because she believed in his potential for good. Perhaps if she used her intelligence of the system for evil, Will would judge her, but she only did this stuff to keep them safe. Y/N was smart... except for when it came to Steve.

At a basketball game, Billy shoved Steve to the ground. His head hit the hardwood floor with a sharp crack. Y/N was running across the court in an instant. Will and Dustin watched from the bleachers.

"We gotta stop her," Will whispered, standing up and shimmying past the other people in the seats. Dustin got up too, but he didn't understand why or what they were doing. Billy stood over Steve, taunting him. Y/N threw her pom-pom at his face. It didn't hurt him, but it was enough of a distraction to keep him from bothering Steve anymore.

"Hey, ass wipe! You're on the same team!" Her ponytail bounced as she yelled at him with her whole body.

"He was in my way, princess. Tell your boyfriend to stay out my way," he grinned.

"I'll tell him after I fucking snatch your tongue out of your damn mouth!" she lunged at him, just as Will and Dustin made it to her. She was a rather small girl, so between the both of them they could hold her back. If the situation wasn't so dire, they might have found it comical to see Y/N in her cheerleading outfit, with the big bow in her hair, picking a fight with Billy. There's was nothing funny about how desperate she seemed to want to tear him apart. They wound their arms around her waist, and pushed her back. The coach started yelling at Hargrove and forced him to sit on the bench.

"I'll fucking tear you apart, you fucking tool!" she screamed at him as he walked away, still trying to get at him. Dustin and Will desperately pulled her back. They were beginning to lose their grip on her, when Jonathan finally made it over.

"Hey!" he called over her incessant yelling, "forget about him! Check on Steve," he urged as she fought past him. She stopped almost

immediately, then turned back around to kneel beside Steve who was sitting up now, trying to clear the fog from his mind.

“Hey,” he smiled looking over at her as if he hadn’t known she was even at the game.

“Hey, rockstar,” she laughed softly, “how are you?”

“My head hurts,” he frowned, reaching back to touch where he hit his head.

“You’re gonna be alright, champ, walk it off,” she rubbed his back encouragingly.

“You’re really pretty,” he admitted, looking like an absolute dope.

She snorted and rolled her eyes, “How hard did you hit your head?”

“... Hard.”

“Come on, let’s get you up.” She pulled him up and as soon as he was on his feet the crowd clapped. Will knew then that Y/N, was in love with Steve, he just wasn’t sure if she knew it. Will looked up at Y/N as he sat with her on the couch, wondering how he could ask her about how she felt about Steve. From his experience, he knew Y/N was very emotionally open, but could she talk about Steve openly. She happened to look down at him.

“What?”

“Nothing, just thinking,” he shrugged.

“What are you thinking about?”

“About love,” he sighed. She rose an eyebrow.

“Somebody catch your eye, Byers,” she smirked.

“No, but I was wondering how I would know if I was in love, or how I would know if they loved me back.”

“Hmm, that is tricky,” she nodded thoughtfully, “well I’d say you

know you're in love when you would do anything for that one person. When you think about them before you think about yourself sometimes. They're able to make you smile even when you don't feel like it... it's a feeling. It feels like Sunday mornings, you know? Sunday mornings with a big breakfast and you know that in that moment everything is alright."

"How do you know if someone loves you?"

"They'll show you. Or they'll tell you. Saying I love you isn't the only way to tell someone you love them."

Will listened and decided, she was right. Y/N told all of them she loved them, that included Steve. He'd seen her pull Steve into a hug, kiss his cheek and tell him she loved him, and she'd do the same to any one of them. What made things different with her and Steve were the other ways she said I love you. When they all sat in the hospital after Steve got a concussion from Billy shoving him to the ground, she sat right by his side joking with him.

"You'll be fine, Steve. You've already got a few screws loose, a couple more won't hurt."

"Will you stay here with me? Mom's not gonna come," he replied ignoring her jab. It was more or less to make Will and Dustin laugh anyway.

"Of course. I'll be right here. I'll always be right here okay. So don't worry about it," she reached up and ran her fingers lightly through his hair. He leaned over and rested his head on her shoulder. She stayed too, since Steve wasn't allowed to go to sleep she stayed up with him all night. The boys went home with Joyce, but Y/N stayed sitting in the hospital bed poking fun at Steve.

At length, Will decided Y/N was in love with Steve too, but she just didn't realize it was love, and he couldn't quite understand how that could be. The knock on the door made him suspend his line of thought. Y/N answered the door, and Will watched her greet the other members of the party who came over. She pulled Jane into a hug and kissed her cheek, commenting on how pretty she looked, then she hugged Dustin and commented on his hair.

“Oh my god, why is it like deja vu. Steve, this is how you looked in middle school,” she giggled, looking up at Steve who only rolled his eyes, “You’re looking fly, kid,” she settled. Dustin grinned excitedly. She didn’t think he would ever quite be like Steve at that age, which was a good thing. Dustin cared too much, about too many things.

“Yo, Harrington. Stacy Jenkins wants a date with you,” Y/N punched him lightly in the stomach. The hit moved in slow motion, as a type of playful greeting.

“Oh I know. I told her no thanks. I’m focusing on school.”

“No you’re not. Steve, you gotta get back on the dating horse at some point. Stacy’s nice, and I think she’d be a good influence.”

“Alright, *Mom* .”

“Don’t call me that. I’m just looking out for you,” she pouted glaring up at him. Their height difference would always be slightly comical. She stood at about the same height as the rest of the kids, but she was tougher than Steve. She reached up and squished his face in her hands.

“Who loves you, Steve Harrington?” she demanded.

“You,” he answered, voice marred by the pressure on his cheeks.

“So let me look out for you,” she let him go.

“I will get back on the ‘dating horse’, but not with Stacy Jenkins, and in my own time.”

“Okay. I just can’t stand the idea of you doing this every Saturday.”

“What’s wrong with this?”

“It’s lame. Not worthy of Steve Harrington.”

“You’re doing the exact same thing. Wait a second, hey when are *you* gonna get back on the dating horse?”

She opened her mouth then closed it, looking away from Steve. She

looked at the floor, as if it were suddenly the most interesting thing in the world.

"I'm sorry," Steve murmured, taking her hand.

"Huh, oh no, don't be sorry," she shook her head, but she still didn't look up at him. Will wondered at this. He wondered about her reaction.

"I didn't think-"

"I'll get back on the dating horse when you do, Harrington. How about that?"

The endless possibilities of that sentence, did she know what she could be proposing, Will wondered. In saying that they would both go back to dating at the same time, did she realize she'd opened up the possibility that they could then date each other? He didn't know, so he was left with that conundrum for the rest of the night.

4. Meddling Kids

“They’re in love!” Will sighed as he sat in the Wheeler’s basement, “They’ve got to get together.” It wasn’t like Will to meddle in other people’s business but it was agonizing to watch his two favorite teens circle around each other like this. He let his head fall on the table, disrupting the game of DnD.

“We know Steve’s in love, but Y/N’s hard to read,” Mike sighed, giving up on the campaign since Will seemed so preoccupied with matchmaking.

“I’m telling you, she loves him,” Will grumbled against the table. Jane looked at Mike and nodded her agreement. Jane understood love on the simplest terms; she knew the feeling. She could also see the love on other people’s faces. Perhaps it was a facet of her other gifts, or perhaps she was just a bit more intuitive and empathetic. Either way, she agreed with Will. Y/N was just as smitten as Steve was.

“So what do we do then?” Dustin demanded.

“Um, nothing?” Lucas scrunched up his face at the party, “that’s *not* our business and I, for one, don’t wanna piss off Y/N by getting up in her business.”

“I think they’d be sweet together,” Max admitted. Lucas turned to give her a look of incredulous betrayal.

“You’re my girlfriend, you’re supposed to be on my side!”

“That’s presumptuous of you,” she snorted. Lucas rolled his eyes, having learned the definition of “presumptuous” since their meeting. Dustin narrowed his eyes, repeating the word in his head.

“You guys! They’re gonna graduate soon, it’s kind of now or never,” Mike reminded. Will took to lightly banging his head on the table. The rest of the kids spared him a glance before launching back into their argument. Mike was right, they only had a couple of months to get them together. Y/N was going to college, as was Steve just with

significantly less scholarship. What the kids didn't know, was that they were going to the same school, which was more Steve's design than Y/N. Steve walked downstairs to their yelling, and Will still face down on the table. They were always yelling at each other, so he didn't think much of it. Then he heard his name thrown into the mix.

"What are you nerds talking about?" Steve demanded as he walked deeper into the basement. They all got quiet, staring wide eyed at Steve. Will recovered when everyone else was silent.

"You have to ask Y/N out."

"Oh my god, we've been through this," Steve groaned, turning around to go upstairs.

"Steve, cut the crap, we know you like her, okay," Mike snapped. Steve whirled around to yell at Mike for being a little shit, but Jane was walking towards him.

"It's okay," she assured, patting his arm, "she loves you too." The words were a little disjointed, but the sincerity in them could not be questioned.

"S-she told you that?!" Steve stuttered, face going a bright shade of red.

"Didn't tell. I know," she promised.

Steve rolled his eyes, "What do you guys know about love?"

"We know that people don't have to tell you they love you, to say that they love you," Will explained. Steve furrowed his eyebrows, trying to work out the riddle that had been Will's sentence.

"Y/N's smart, right?" Will began, and continued when Steve nodded, "but she does stupid things when you're involved right?"

"Yeah, like when you got hurt by the demo-dogs and she ran straight to you without a weapon," Dustin reminded.

"Or when Billy insulted you and she threw her textbook across the

room at him and got detention,” Max added, having heard that story second hand from Y/N.

“Or in the diner when Tommy and Carol showed up and she punched Tommy in the face and we got kicked out,” Mike jumped.

“Okay I get it,” Steve rolled his eyes, “she’s my friend, she’s protective, that’s just what she does.”

“Not with us. She protects *us* and never gets into trouble,” Will shook his head. Steve was silent, thinking that over. He couldn’t particularly say that Y/N loved the kids less, because that wasn’t the case at all. What could he say back to that accusation, except that they were just wrong, it meant something else. Y/N didn’t think of him as anything other than a friend. They’re friendship was so good that he could live with just being her friend. She was one of the best things about his life.

“I’m fine, guys. Okay? We’re fine,” Steve assured with a sigh as he sat on the couch. Its springs creaked as he let his body fall on it. The kids looked between each other, stunned that Steve was no longer fighting against the idea that he love Y/N.

“B-but...she loves you,” Dustin continued confusedly.

“As a friend,” Steve sighed, “Y/N’s different, she cares for friends a lot. So maybe she gets a little stupid when it comes to me. We’ve been friends a *long* time. Feelings only grow... I dunno stronger with her? She’s just... she’s different. She doesn’t date anymore.”

“But she said that if you started dating so would she,” Will reminded.

“I don’t expect her to do that. It’s different, alright?” Steve snapped, suddenly frustrated with their questioning. He covered his face with his hands, trying to block out the rest of the world along with his own thoughts. He couldn’t block out his thoughts, they were swarming with the reasons why Y/N didn’t date. He was trying not to remember their sophomore year of high school, and the bruises he should have noticed sooner. That year was such a turning point for their friendship, it was the moment he realized he’d never leave her alone. It was the moment their friendship started meaning more than

anything else.

“What...happen?” Jane’s soft voice asked. Steve moved his hand and saw the curly haired girl kneeling on the floor beside the couch looking at him warily. For what she lacked in common knowledge about the world and how it worked, she made up for it by being perceptive. She could read people well.

“Nothing I-”

“Friends. Don’t. Lie,” her face hardened as she uttered the phrase. Steve pulled in a deep breath, pulling himself up to sit straighter. He wasn’t sure why, but he felt like he had to tell them. Maybe it was for the sake of them understanding, so they would stop trying to force them together.

“We were sophomores-”

“Soft-more?” Jane repeated confusedly.

“It means the second year of high school,” Steve explained, she nodded, “Y/N started dating this guy. He was in his last year of high school. It made her popular, but this guy... he wasn’t good.”

Steve was struggling to explain things in simple terms for Jane, but also to talk and not get emotional. There was a lot he still blamed himself for.

“He um he hit her, a lot. And I didn’t know. She would say that the bruises were from cheerleading. I was too busy... being full of myself to question it... but I should have known. I don’t know how someone gets a monthly black eye from cheerleading.”

The kids were silent, listening. They breathed shallowly, afraid that if they made any sound Steve would stop talking. In his pause, they all held their breath. Steve rubbed his eye to catch a tear before it could fall. The rest of the party might not have realized how much this was getting to him but Jane did. She took his hand, a thing she did to all of her friends frequently. Steve looked at her, startled by her sudden move to comfort him.

“They dated for a year, so I assume that it was a year of him hitting

her before I found out. She was at a party, and she was drinking... a lot. She doesn't really drink usually so I was worried. She just kept drinking and I knew she was going to get sick so I tried to make her stop..."

Steve kept talking but mentally he was back at that party, on that night. She was pouring straight vodka into a cup that maybe had a splash of cranberry juice in it. He took the bottle from her, making the clear alcohol splash on the counter onto the floor.

"Hey!" she slurred, turning to glare, "I wasn't done! Wait your turn!"

"Y/N, you've had enough," he responded, screwing the top back on the liquor, before placing it on a top shelf out of her reach. She pouted at him for a moment, but put the cup to her mouth. Steve huffed and snatched the cup away from her. She whined at him and reached for the cup. He held it out of her reach as she pressed against him to grab it. When she realized she'd never be able to grab the cup, she grabbed some other cup sitting on the counter.

"Y/N," he groaned trying to keep alcohol away from her. She smacked his hands away, and he pushed hers as they descended into a frenzied battle of wills. Frustration rose up in Steve's chest like bile.

"Hey, hey! Stop!" he yelled at her, suddenly grabbing her by the tops of her arms, "Y/N! Stop it!" he shook her lightly. He was sure he hadn't hurt her, yet she stared up at him in a petrified silence.

"Please," she cried quietly, pitifully, "not you too. Please don't. I can't."

She devolved into sobs, and Steve watched in horror. It was as if some small part of him knew.

"What do you mean?"

Her eyes strayed past him, into the front room where her boyfriend was yelling about something. Steve looked too, but only for a moment, "What do you mean?" he asked again.

"Don't... don't hurt me. Please," she finished her thoughts.

It all clicked into place. Horror froze him for exactly one second. In that second, he thought of killing the boy across the room, but Y/N was still sobbing, her face buried in his chest now. She was still mumbling, saying things he wanted to hear, things he needed to hear.

“Come on,” he coaxed, leading her to the only private place in the party: the bathroom. When they got in, Y/N decided to sit inside the bathtub, and Steve leaned against the sink.

“He hits me,” she said plainly, “I... know he can’t do that... I know, but he does. I don’t know why... Why I let him. I could fight... I can. But I... I think I love him. If I fight...he’ll... He’ll kill me,” she started sobbing again. Everything inside of him wanted to go fight her boyfriend, to beat him to a pulp, but Y/N was drunk and sobbing in someone’s bathtub. He couldn’t leave her to go beat up her boyfriend. He took her home instead. In the morning she begged him not to go talk to her boyfriend.

“You’ll make it worse!” She cried, “He’ll kill me.”

“I won’t let him,” he insisted.

“You. Don’t. Get it! He’ll kill me! You wanna help?!”

“Of course I do!”

“Just, shut up about it! Okay?! Just... Just! I need my friend!” she yelled, grabbing the roots of her hair as if she meant to pull it out. Steve understood. She would stop talking if he pushed her. She’d push him away and she’d be all alone with that creep. So Steve backed off. It was another month before the breaking point. It was 3 AM, witching hour, when a frantic knock woke him from his sleep. He trudged, groggily through his house, to the front door. When he opened the door, there was Y/N, in her pajamas with a big jacket over it. Her face was swelling, the silk camisole she wore was ripped and ruined with blood. There were bruises all over her legs.

“I broke up with him,” she said in a hollow voice. Steve carefully pulled her inside. She didn’t say anything else, she just hugged him. He hugged her back, grateful that she was alive, furious that she was injured. After a long while, he took her to the bathroom to clean up all the blood. It was then that she started talking again.

"I just... I snapped. He was mad about that night you took me home... he said I was sleeping with you. When I told him I didn't he hit me... he just... kept. Hitting. Me. Then he said he was gonna come here and I... I snapped. I don't remember how but then I was just punching his face. I was just punching. I didn't kill him, but I should have. I should have killed him," her voice was still hollow as if she wasn't all there.

"Did you drive here?" Steve asked. She shrugged, then groaned in pain. Her shoulder didn't move, it was dislocated.

"I don't know. I was just here."

Steve would later learn she walked. She walked 3 miles from her boyfriend's house to his. She didn't remember any of it. He took her to the hospital. She didn't press charges against her boyfriend. He was graduating and going away to Chicago, she didn't see the point of spending money on a lawyer. Steve remembered when he saw the guy again in school. Y/N took medical leave and they sent her homework to her. Y/N did a number on him. His face was almost entirely bruised, as was the rest of his body. Steve felt a swell of pride at the sight of his injuries. It served him right, he deserved worse. They were closer after that, both slightly afraid she'd find herself in the same predicament at some point. Y/N never dated again, despite the fact that she was attracted to several people. Steve figured it was because she was afraid.

At the end of his account, the children were still silent.

"Don't tell her I told you," Steve warned after a moment, coming back to himself.

"She loves you," Jane insisted again, "Y/N...strong. And if two people... love, they should be...together."

"We are together... just not *together*."

Everyone else was still quiet. It occurred to Steve that perhaps they were all too young to have heard this story, but then he remembered that these were the same kids who fought other dimensional creatures. There was no more talk of getting Y/N and Steve together.

However, the thought never quite left his head. He could see it clearly, not because they were so well suited for each other, but because Steve imagined them together regularly since he was 13. They would be perfect together. They wouldn't need to navigate half of the problem areas that other couples do because they've been there and done that. Everything would be the same, but fundamentally different because it was romantic. He could help her make the big Sunday breakfast she always made, like he always did, but *now* when he reached over her he'd place a gentle hand on her lower back, or he'd kiss her as he gave her the ingredient she needed. On Saturday nights when they all crowded together for movie nights, she wouldn't sit nuzzled into his side, he'd pull her into his lap. Friday study session would mean kisses for every right answer, and every day at school he would greet her with a kiss. He could see the set of pajamas, that were always his favorite. It was light blue, made of silk. The camisole was fashioned for a taller woman so it was a bit too long, and it made the tiny silk shorts disappear behind the hem. He could see her in those pajamas and not force himself to look away when she bent over and he could see those unbelievably tiny shorts. The shorts that showed off the perfect curves of the bottom of her butt, if he looked, and he didn't look... if he could help it.

All of these perfect, irreplaceable, platonic moments could be something other. They were perfect, though, and irreplaceable, and he was fine with them being platonic. So why would he ever ask her for anything else? Why would he ask when he knew that their friendship was something precious, something sacred that she was so devoted to. How selfish could he be? He would never do that because Y/N was different. She always would be.

"I'm taking you to Y/N's right," he asked Jane as she got in his car. She nodded, putting on her seatbelt. Hopper wouldn't be home until very late tonight, something about government people. Steve didn't ask, Y/N just asked him to bring Jane over after the kids finished their game. She invited him over for dinner too, since both of their parents were out of town and Y/N was the only one who knew how to cook. She gave Hopper her nutrition speech, and would save him the leftovers so he could eat something other than T.V.-Dinners.

The moment they parked, Jane hopped out of the car and ran up to

the door. Steve moved slower, smiling at her enthusiasm. Jane, along with Will, had really latched on to Y/N. He assumed it was because she didn't have mother, so Y/N was the next best thing. All of the kids jokingly called Y/N mom. Jane was the only one who ever meant anything by it. He remembered moment in which Jane slept over from movie nights, and she helped make the sunday breakfast. She had strawberry jam on her cheek and Y/N thoughtlessly licked her finger then wiped the jam away.

"Thanks, mom," Jane responded with a kind, albeit, teasing smile. Y/N only rolled her eyes at the name now.

Y/N opened the door and Jane immediately hugged her, resting her chin comfortably on the older girl's shoulder. There was a certain amount of comfort to be taken from hugging someone her own height. It was indescribable, as if she were finally on equal ground. Once more, Jane felt herself taking a great amount of comfort from Y/N. In her she saw herself, in the sense that they were both strong, went through traumatic experiences by the hands of bad men, and had resurfaced from it. Perhaps, she thought, that it was she found Y/N so easy to read. Y/N, like herself, was strong in ways people found frightening, but vulnerable in ways that others could not comprehend.

"Did you have fun today?" Y/N addressed as Jane let her go. Jane nodded excitedly, then pressed a soft kiss to Y/N's cheek before continuing into the house. Little bits of affection were common from Jane, but they always made Y/N's affection for the young girl grow exponentially. Though she wasn't particularly okay being called "mom", she had to admit that she felt a maternal kind of love for Jane, one she never thought she was capable.

"They took forever with their game," Steve complained as he walked in. Y/N gave him a reproaching look for his complaining.

"I'm sure that's how our parents felt when we hung out," she reminded, closing the front door after him. Steve rolled his eyes as he took off his jacket and tossed it on the couch.

"Yeah, but we were doing fun stuff."

“Oh don’t be a jackass,” she scoffed, “they have fun with their game too.” Her hands rested on her hips. They were covered in light blue silk.

“Suuure. They yell at each other most of the time.”

“And we didn’t?!” She turned around to walk to the kitchen. Steve followed her, eyes trained on the way her hips swayed. Now that the thought of something different was on his mind he couldn’t help but think about the possibilities behind every moment they shared. Her hair a mess of fluffy curls, rested on her shoulders. He thought pushing it out of the way, baring the smooth brown skin of her neck and kissing there, just for a moment, just because he could.

“I remember that you couldn’t climb to the top of the tree in the backyard and you would cry like a little baby. Y/N! That’s no fair!” she mocked him, turning around to mimic his frown from his youth.

“That was dangerous! I was looking out for your best interest.”

“Mom! Y/N’s to high in the tree!”

“I was like 10!”

“Oh then should we talk about you at thirteen?! Don’t be tough, Y/N! I’m the tough one,” she continued to mock his voice. Steve frowned at her and she through her head back laughing at his face.

“Come on, all you did was whine.”

“It wasn’t whining. I *was* the tough one.”

“Sure, Harrington,” she snorted, turning back around so she could grab plates from the cabinets, “Dinner’s already finished. I even made dessert, because I was feeling frisky,” she reached up on her tippy toes for plates. Steve might have helped any other time if he wasn’t preoccupied with the way the tank top lifted over her posterior, and showed those infamous tiny, blue shorts. The pajama set was a gift from a relative, so it likely came together. While she was a small in the waist she was not a small in her most feminine areas. Steve wanted to put his head through a wall, whilst cursing Will Byers’ name for putting any of this in his head. That simple curve would be

his undoing. Unfortunately, when Steve didn't help, Y/N began climbing on the counter. She put one knee up on the counter effortlessly, a feat of flexibility from cheerleading no doubt, and that only made the shorts ride up. At this point, Steve forced himself to look away. His eyes went from Y/N's ass to Jane's judging eyes.

"Creep," she murmured at him.

"Who taught you that word?" he grumbled, he didn't try to deny her. He was being creepy.

"Fuck, Harrington what the hell are you good for?" Y/N complained as she got back down, having put the plates on the counter.

"Sorry, I'm a little out of it."

"He was looking at your butt," Jane outted him, taking the plates from the counter and putting them on the table.

"No! I wasn't."

Jane looked over at him, throwing him a skeptical glare, "I wasn't!" he repeated.

"Ah it's okay," Y/n clapped her hand on his back, "it's been awhile hasn't it, Harrington." She teased grinning mischievously at him.

"Oh fuck off."

"As a friend, it would behove of me to help you through this drought," she continued to joke.

"Fuck. Off."

"Alright, alright," she went to help Jane set the table, but not without shaking her butt a little. Steve, of course, noticed it.

"Oh. My. God. You were looking!" she exclaimed.

"What?!"

"Steve Harrington! You were looking at my butt!"

Jane giggled.

“No! I was just-”

“Staring at my ass! What’s gotten into you? The Steve Harrington *I know* would never!”

Steve was positively red in the face, stuttering trying to make up for the fact that he was obviously staring.

“Are you just not used to women of my shape? Not used to ass? Nancy didn’t have much of an ass... neither did Dianne. Didn’t think you were an ass man though, Steve? Or are you just tired of your h-”

“There is a child present, Y/N!” Steve yelled at her as she lifted her hand as if to model jerking-off. Y/N paused to look at Jane who was smiling, amused by their banter.

“Sorry. I’m just baffled. I’ve worn this pajama set around you multiple times! Am I gonna have to start wearing the grandma nightie?”

“No, just. I zoned out, and your ass happened to be in my field of vision.”

“Okay,” she agreed, but she still had that smirk that told him she didn’t believe him one bit. Things were silent again. They sat at the kitchen table to eat. The sound of forks scraping plates was the only sound coming from the three of them. Y/N still had that smirk on her face and it made Steve wary.

“I do have one question,” She asked finally.

“What is it?”

“Are these doing it for you too?” she pressed her arms in such a way that it pushed her breasts up, and made them somehow more prominent in the tank top.

“Oh my god! Will you drop it?!” Steve groaned, dropping his fork.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’m just not accustomed to the male gaze. I

don't know what to do," she spoke like pious southern belle.

"You're a real piece of work, you know that?" He looked over to see Jane laughing quietly, "Don't encourage her."

Jane only laughed harder at the reprimand. Steve couldn't help the smile playing on his lips. No matter what, Y/N would be his friend, first and foremost.

5. The Prettiest Girl in School

“Come on!” Steve whined as he waited downstairs by the front door. Y/N’s car was *mysteriously* vandalized over the weekend, so she was riding to school with Steve. They were both pretty sure Billy did it, but without solid proof, there was nothing to be done about it.

“I’m coming!” she yelled back as she swiped mascara over her eyelashes.

“You said that twenty minutes ago.”

“Well, Harrington. I can’t just roll out of bed and go!” she snapped back, “and the longer we talk about how long it’s taking, the longer I’ll take.”

He groaned and hit his head lightly against the wall. Soon enough he heard her running down the steps, her bouncy mess of chemically trained curls bouncing with her as she hurried.

“You’re so unpleasant in the morning,” she complained, looking up at him with a pout. Steve wanted to continue to be upset, but she looked adorable, and if this is what she spent all that time down, then he guessed it was all worth it. Her hair was secured up with banana clips, in to a sweet little hairstyle that reminded him of eighth grade.

“How do I look Stevie?” she asked.

“Great, now let’s go,” he sighed, keeping up his sour expression.

“You know, I thought you’d appreciate my efforts a bit more, now that you’re making a habit of staring at me.”

“How many times do I have to say fuck off, before you fuck off?”

“I dunno, say it again, and I’ll see what I think.”

“Would you like to walk to school?” Steve asked as he stopped in front of the passenger side door and opened it.

As she got in she said, "Oh you'd like that wouldn't you, so you could drive real slow behind me like a fucking creep."

"You know what? Get out." He pointed back towards her house, and Y/N threw her head back laughing. He loved how she did that, how she laughed up at the heavens. He sighed, this was getting out of hand.

"You know, Tina likes meaningless sex. I could hook you up," she mentioned as Steve got in the car.

"Why do you think I want meaningless sex?" he sighed, making a show of being bored, but honestly his insides were burning. Sure, sex was a common topic for them. She knew just about every detail of his sex life, and he knew just about everything about hers. She just had far fewer sexual exploits than he did. However, talking about sex now with her, made him nervous.

"Steve, you're sweating like a whore in church. I think you need some action."

"Okay, *maybe* that's none of your business."

"*Now* we have boundaries!" she exclaimed, "Steve Harrington, there are no boundaries between me and you. I mean I know that you like having your hair pulled. I know that about you!" she pointed out and Steve let his head fall on the steering wheel. He wished that some unknown force would have mercy on him and strike him down.

"And *you* know that I like dominance. This is a two way street, sweetheart. I could give you tips on living through a dry spell."

"Oh my god, do you ever shut up?"

"No! Not when my best friend is in a bind. If you're looking at me, then you *must* have it bad," she giggled. Steve looked at her confusedly, replaying her words in his head a couple of times. What the hell did *that* mean?

"So, coconut oil is a really good, natural lubricant-"

"Gah! Stop. Stop it!" he exclaimed she kept talking so he turned on

the radio, full volume. She fell back against the seat laughing. Steve started the car and sped off towards the school. Y/N dropped the subject, and took up talking about prom. Prom was right around the corner. Y/N already had her dress, she also had hair and make-up appointments set.

“Well, you know Tyler asked me, and I felt so bad saying no because he got me a teddy bear and balloons and chocolates. He’s really a sweet guy, but Kelly was hoping he’d ask her and you know how I love Kelly,” she rambled.

“Is that the only reason you said no?” Steve asked.

“Well... no.”

“Are you waiting for someone else?”

“In fact, I am,” she admitted.

Steve turned to look at her, stunned by her admission, “Who?”

“Well, I’ll tell you about him. I’ve known him for years,” she began, and Steve began making a mental list of boys, “he’s on the basketball team, he’s pretty good too. He’s got great hair, oh and a heart of gold. He probably doesn’t have a date either... he does hang out with middle schoolers which is a little weird, I’m not gonna lie.”

Steve glanced at her suspiciously. It sounded an awful lot like she was describing him.

“He’s the only guy I trust, and I figured I’d stay free for him, just in case no other girls caught his eye.”

“Well that’s shitty, you shouldn’t be some guy’s last resort,” he commented.

“I’ll make an exception for him. It’s not like he’s gonna get prom night sex with me, and he’s been going through a bit of a dry spell you see, so I thought I’d let him survey the other options first.”

“Y/N.”

“Yes, Steve?”

“Will you go to prom with me?” he asked, throwing a lazy glance over at her.

“Oh well, *I guess* .”

Steve rolled his eyes, but he couldn't fight the smile on his face. Even if they were just friends, it was a privilege to go to prom with Y/N. She was arguably one of the prettiest girls in school and definitely the most popular.

“Mom'll get a kick out of this,” she smiled fondly, “now are you sure you don't wanna try Tina. She's putting out.”

“I'd take you over Tina any day,” he vowed.

“My god Steve, when did you get so sweet? It's the kids isn't it? They say having kids makes you go soft.”

“Oh look who's talking?! You give all of them forehead kisses, and practically read them bedtime stories.”

She shrugged, “Jane has trouble sleeping.”

“You let Billy get away with trashing your car!”

“But did I?” she asked with a sly smile, pressing a pensive finger to her lips. Steve pulled into the school parking lot to see Billy's car in its usual place. It was covered in dicks that seemed carved into metal. Steve audibly gasped and turned to glare open mouthed at Y/N.

“You're a mad woman,” he whispered as they parked.

“*I* didn't do anything,” she replied indignantly.

“He's gonna think you did it.”

“Why would he? Why would I vandalize his car, he hasn't done anything to me as of late. Besides, I was with you and Jane all weekend. AND when I presume the crime happened, I was with Chief Hopper himself giving him the results of me and Jane's girl talk.”

“How did you-”

“I didn’t,” she shrugged, but a coy smile was still on her face. She opened her door and stepped out. Steve sat, stunned for a moment. She was right, there was no way she could have done anything to Billy’s car, she had an alibi... but then how did she do it. Steve got out and jogged to catch up with her. Now, where Steve would have gone over and bragged, Y/N went right into school sparing the car the same surprised glance as everyone else. Billy was waiting for her at her locker. She already had all of her books though, so she went straight to first period. Steve followed her, wary of Billy, but also in awe of her diabolical capabilities. As if she needed to be more alluring. With that thought came another, that was almost forgotten within everything else. What had she meant by “ If you’re looking at me, then you *must* have it bad”? Why did she say it like she was the bottom of the barrel. She spoke as if Steve hadn’t *always* been aware of how devastatingly beautiful she was. This was the girl who got teddy bears, balloons, and candy for every holiday from resident boys. Once Steve suffered through hours of this kid on the basketball team talking about how proud his family would be, if he landed a girl like Y/N. Of course Steve thought she was beautiful, but she was also his best friend. He wasn’t inclined to give her amorous gazes before. Even though he wasn’t *inclined* he noticed the things about her that everyone else did.

“Why do you think I have to ‘have it bad’ to look at you?” Steve asked curiously, as they sat in their first period. Y/N looked away from her notebook to him, raising a quizzical eyebrow. She was sure this conversation was over.

“Well, you knew me when I had braces... and when I wore fucking pig tails man. Can’t imagine much sex appeal coming from that. Plus, I dunno. I always figured you saw me more as a sibling.”

“I wouldn’t stare at my sister’s ass.”

‘So you admit it?!’ she gasped.

“Nevermind that. Y/N, you’re beautiful.”

“Yes.”

“And any guy would be lucky to have you.”

“Yes.”

“And we can be totally platonic and still see attractive features in each other.”

“Yes.”

“You could also have your pick of any guy in school. You don’t have to go with me. Just because you’re not putting out, doesn’t mean you can’t go to prom with some guy, and have a nice time.”

“I know,” she nodded, “I just wanted to go with you, but I also didn’t want to put a damper on your night.” She shrugged to make her confession more casual, but it was easy to see the insecurity veiled under the facade.

“Y/N.”

“It’s just... I dunno kinda metaphorical. If I could have you... as my prom date now... then maybe that means we won’t drift in college.”

“There’s no way I’d pass up going to prom with prettiest girl in Hawkins High,” he grinned.

“Yeah you’re saying that now,” she rolled her eyes.

“You were always the prettiest.”

“You’re the prettiest boy in all of Hawkins.”

“Think we’ll make Prom King and Queen.”

“I think *I*’ll get prom queen. Can’t say much for you.”

“You know, that was rude and uncalled for. I’m trying to be supportive, and you’re just tearing me down. That’s not how friends work.”

“I already called you pretty, you want me to lie to you some more.”

“This is the last time I ever try being nice to you.” He huffed turning away from her. She smirked still looking at him, studying his profile.

He was the prettiest boy.

“Hey,” she called, her voice soft and gently. Steve looked over to see the smile that plagued the entire male student body, “who loves you?”

“I dunno anymore,” he snorted, playing up the act of being scorned.

“I do. You’re the light of my life Steve Harrington. I don’t know how many times I have to say it before you get it through your thick skull.”

He opened his mouth to respond with something snarky that would keep them on the right side of platonic and in love. That was their game. One of them would say something too intense, the other would play it off. Otherwise it got weird, because what if they took it seriously and they didn’t mean it seriously. However, the game got cut short when Billy strut in. Both Y/N and Steve stared at him confusedly. He didn’t have first period with them. Billy let his tongue trail across his bottom lip as he swaggered down the aisle. He stopped just between Y/N and Steve’s desks.

“I thought you were more mature,” He spoke looking straight ahead.

“Billy, are you okay?” Y/N asked in a faux concerned voice. He turned to glare down at her. She looked back at him with big doe eyes. She blinked slowly, putting the icing on the cake of her innocent look.

“I’m fine, sweetheart. But you’re little pretty boy isn’t gonna be,” he answered, grinning her.

“Billy,” she warned in a low voice, “walk away.”

“Messing with other people’s things isn’t nice, Harrington,” he turned his back to Y/N. Her heart rate skyrocketed.

“Hey!” she yelled, standing up, “you leave him alone!”

Billy ignored her and Steve stood, not fond of Billy towering over him as he sat down. Y/N went around her desk and wedged herself between them, so that her chest was almost pressed against Billy.

“He didn’t do anything.” she growled, “Maybe you just finally pissed off the wrong person.”

“Would that be you, sweetheart?”

“Oh no. If I had a problem with you I’d just talk to your parents,” she shook her head, “but I don’t recall any reason for me to have a problem with you right now.” She rose an eyebrow. It was a reminder that he had vandalized her car first, this was just an eye for an eye. If he stood by the idea that he didn’t do anything to her car then Y/N would have no reason to target him.

“I’d say we’ve been quite friendly, L/N. Especially now,” he licked his lips looking down at her.

“Then one *friend* to another, back off. You mess with Steve, you mess with me and I’m *really* not the kind of girl you wanna mess with,” she poked him, just over the rib she’d cracked months ago. She was sure it still ached sometimes.

“Where were you this weekend?”

“I was having dinner with Chief Hopper. Steve was there too. We didn’t have anything to do with your fucking car,” she growled.

“Fine... I just wanted to spend a little more time like this with you,” he grinned down at her, referencing how close they were. The rows between the desks were narrow, so in order to stand in between them her back side had to press against Steve and her front just barely touching Billy.

“You’re a creep,” she scoffed.

The teacher walked into the classroom, “Mr. Hargrove. Is there a reason you’re in my classroom.”

“Nope,” he answered, still looking at Y/N, “just talking to the prettiest girl in Hawkins High.” He then turned around and left. Y/N let a breath, she hadn’t realized she was holding, out. She turned around to look at Steve.

“He’s such an ass,” she pouted, “I wish he’d drive off a fucking cliff in

that ugly ass car.”

“You’re kinda cute when you’re wishing death upon someone,” he grinned.

“Oh fuck off, Steve,” she snapped. Steve’s face went blank. Her pout stayed on her face, as she went back around to her desk. She sat down and rested her cheek in her hand, supported by her arm on the desk. The way she held her head, made her hair fall like a curtain between them. She didn’t speak to him for the rest of the class. When the bell rang she got up with her books and sped towards the door. Steve scrambled to grab his things and follow her.

“Hey!” he called as he made it into the hallway. He could see her small form retreating. He jogged after her. He reached out and took her hand. She whirled around to glare at him.

“Hey,” he repeated, softer this time.

“What?” she demanded.

“What did I do?”

“Nothing,” she pouted looking away from him.

“Bubbz.”

“I just. God I don’t like that he uses you to get to me. I just... I can’t think straight when he threatens you. I feel like- like on edge.” she explained in a rush. Steve pulled her over to the side of the hallway.

“Hey I can handle myself,” he assured. She glared up at him, lips pursed, obviously disbelieving of his assertion, “I can!” he insisted.

“Not alone,” she settled, “and it would be my fault. I can’t be the reason you get hurt.”

“I’m fine-”

“Stop that okay? Stop. It’s not fine. I just wish... I wish he’d leave me alone.” she huffed, letting her head fall forward. They were standing so close that instead of hanging her head, she wound up resting it against Steve’s chest.

"I know," Steve used his free-hand to pat her back. She looked up at him, batting her eyes. Steve was positive she had no idea what half of her facial expression did to people. She was so pretty, and he'd never given dark-brown eyes much thought. He didn't even think much of his own, but Y/N's eyes were like onyx pools filled with endless possibility. They were so dark he could clearly see his own reflection in them. It was something like seeing himself the way she saw him. In her eyes he saw the way his face softened. Did he always do that when he looked at her? Did he always turn to putty.

"I'm sorry for snapping at you," she admitted.

"If I got mad every time you were a little temperamental, I don't think we'd be friends."

"I don't know how I'd live if you weren't my friend."

He scoffed, "I don't know how *I'd* live if you weren't my friend. You'd be fine. You're a tough girl." he turned to walk down the hall, throwing an arm over her shoulder. They walked liked this to their next class.

6. Endless Possibilities

She walked into the gym and turned everyone's head. Her dress fit like a second skin, bright red in color. Ostentatious tulle ruffles engulfed the bottom, following the hem just below her knee up to a scandalous place on her thigh. Any higher and everyone would see the garter holding her fishnet tights up. She wore pumps of the same alarming red as her dress. The red found itself in her lips too, and shined like a freshly licked cherry lollipop. She was known for having amazing hair and she somehow managed to make it even better. It was a mane of crimped, teased hair seen from stars like Whitney Houston. Steve Harrington stood at her side, their arms locked together. His tie and boutonniere matched her dress and corsage respectively. The teens in the gym cleared the way as they walked in, still staring. Y/N broke the dam of awe and envy when she saw a friend, "You look so beautiful," she gushed, in normal y/n fashion. Even when she was the best dressed in the room she still stopped to compliment others. People seemed to go back to talking and dancing. Steve and Y/N did the same. At last year's prom, Steve, Nancy and Y/n all hung out together. As Y/n surveyed the dance floor she saw Nancy and Jonathan. All at once she decided it was time to talk to Nancy again. Before she broke up with Steve they had been friends.

"Hey Wheeler!" She called as she walked over to them.

"Bubbz what are you doing?"

"I'm being an adult," she rolled her eyes at Steve's worried expression. Nancy turned at the sound of her name. Her eyes went to Steve first then skipped down to Y/N

"Yeah?" Her tone was wary. Jonathan, who stood beside her, put an arm around her waist.

Despite everyone's fears, Y/N thrust her hand out, for a handshake, "Truce?"

Nancy slowly smiled and took Y/N's hand, "Truce."

"Good. I'm tired of being angry," she sighed, "I wasn't sleeping well at

night knowing some boy was the reason we weren't talking," she stage whispered hiding her mouth from Steve as if she were truly telling a secret.

Nancy laughed, "I get it though, your his best friend. I'd be pissed too," she admitted.

Y/n nodded then actually took time to look at Nancy, "You look beautiful Nance."

"Thanks you look great too, I mean amazing wow. Cheerleading is really good for just the...the body huh?" She stumbled over her words trying to appropriately compliment Y/N. She wasn't thin like the women in the magazines, but she couldn't exactly be called plus sized either. She was built with thick strong thighs and glutes that melted into a cinched waist, full breasts up to toned arms. If there was any magazine that showcased her body type it was probably a pin-up mag. Steve was more aware of her body than he ever was. As much as he hated being that guy, especially to Y/n he couldn't quite stop looking at her chest, and if she walked ahead of him he would catch a glimpse of her posterior. It was round and it looked firm but pliant like Georgia peach picked at just the right time.

"Steve!" Nancy yelled.

"Huh?" He came back to himself and saw that Y/n was gone. She was easy to relocate, standing by the punch talking to the other cheerleaders.

"You've got it bad," she laughed shaking her head.

"What?"

"You should ask her out. I know you two have been friends forever, and I think that's why you should do it."

"She doesn't feel the same. She loves me as a friend."

"Maybe," Nancy shrugged, "Y/n' s a hard book to read but I do know that she loves hard so even if she doesn't love you like a boyfriend, she won't ever stop loving you as a friend. The question is do you love her enough to still love her as a person, as your friend if she

doesn't want you as a boyfriend."

"Of course!"

"Then what's the risk? Ask her on a date. She's not going anywhere, but if you never ask you'll never know."

Steve kept looking at her, she threw her head back, laughing at something one of the girls by the punch bowl said. She turned her head and caught his stare. She stuck her tongue out at him and kept talking.

"You're right, Nance," Steve responded, going over to join her by the punch. She looked at him curiously as he placed his hand on the small of her back. He just smiled in return, she went back to talking animatedly to the other girl.

"He doesn't deserve you, sweetheart," she concluded emphatically. The girl thanked her then excused herself to go talk to someone else. Y/N turned around to look at Steve. She reached up and straightened his tie.

"Have I told you you look handsome tonight?" she grinned. Her tone was teasing yet sincere. Steve thought his heart would pound out of his chest, just looking down at her.

"I think you called me pretty."

"I always call you pretty. You're handsome tonight," she settled, eyes looking him over kindly.

"Y/N," Steve began, trying to figure out how to tell her. What exact sequence of words would tell her that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her? His brain couldn't think up the right words, especially with her staring up at him. There were three words though that bubbled right up to his lips. He didn't have the mental capacity at the moment to decorate them with other words.

"I love you," he breathed out.

She grinned, "Aw, Steve, I love you too," she answered immediately. Of course she wouldn't take that for what it meant. They'd been

spouting proclamations of love at each other their hold life. Steve wanted to smack himself in the head. He opened his mouth to tell her he was *in* love with her, but then a teacher announced it was time to vote for the Prom King and Queen. By the time they were finished, Y/N was in another conversation.

Maybe this what fate, some merciful God giving him a second chance to keep his mouth shut. He could do that, he was happy with her as they were. This wouldn't be bad. He thought about all the good things about keeping things how they were.

Y/N's eyes trailed over the crowd, remembering last year's prom, and thinking about how this was it. There would be no more prom after this. She'd only see the people who stayed in Hawkins when she came home from school. Popularity would mean nothing in college. She always knew that, it's why she was always kind. Popularity would stop mattering but kindness never would. People remember those who were kind to them. So, as she watched people turn in ballots, she thought about how little that crown meant to her and how little it would mean to her years from now. The one thing from Hawkins she knew would always matter is the boy right beside her. The song changed to one that she found suitable for dancing so she pulled Steve to the dance floor. *Come on Eileen* played, and she laughed thinking about the kids. It was Dustin's favorite song. Lucas always rolled his eyes when the familiar tune started but by the chorus he would sing along. Y/N held Steve's hands as she forced him to dance with her, tugging his arms to and fro so that his body twisted.

"We are far too young and clever!" she sung along, laughing at his expression. Dustin played this song the moment he got in the car. She wondered why Steve let him put in the tape every time. Eventually she pulled a smile out of Steve and got him dance with her. He was never good at denying her anything she wanted. When the song ended *Time After Time* took its place. Y/N naturally linked her arms behind Steve's neck and they engaged in the normal school dance slow song sway. She looked up at him for a moment studying his face, taking in his expression as he looked back at her.

"You made this whole school thing quite the great adventure," she admitted.

"That's one way to look at it," he scoffed.

"How many people can say they fought other-dimensional beings with a bat?"

"Two."

"I'm glad we're going to the same college. Dunno how I'd stay out of trouble without you. You're like 99% of my impulse control."

"I know." He smirked thinking of all the fights he'd carried her away from as they were growing up. From there he thought about what it was like growing up with her: How she had change, how he had changed. They were like two planets, circling around each other, getting so close to collision but always just missing each other. There was a certain satisfaction to be had by both parties in this moment. They were both in each other's arms, perfectly within reach. They had only to reach out and they would collide. They weren't leaving each other, no, but the endless possibilities ahead of them could mean anything. She wouldn't always stay single, Steve considered. She'd been single since the beginning of junior year, but college could mean something different for her. She could fall in love with someone else, and he wasn't sure if he could live through that. He wasn't sure if he could see someone else holding her like this and not regret his complacency. The song changed a couple times and they danced along with it, always within each other's reach. He was sure there would never be a more perfect match for him. She knew him better than anyone he would ever meet could. She knew about things he could never talk about. If he could just make that leap to the other side of the thing that terrified him most.

"Y/N," he began taking her hand as she got done dancing to some upbeat song.

"Yeah?"

"I'm in love with you," he pushed the words out of his mouth, forced himself to make the leap. Her mouth hung open as she stared up at him. It was as if some force stole her voice, or better the air from her lungs. It felt like Steve Harrington had punched her in the stomach. She knew she *ought* to say something but there were no words. Yet,

things that were never quite together matched up, like pieces to a puzzle. She always knew who she wanted. At first she denied herself the possibility of dating Steve because she was still hurt from her last relationship. She wasn't quite the person she wanted to be yet. Then he was dating Nancy, and she thought perhaps he wasn't interested in her at all in that way. She and Nancy didn't have much in common. They were both kind, smart, slightly snarky girls, but Y/N was rougher around the edges and physically softer in places that Nancy was not. Then there was the glaring disparity between race, that she tried to ignore but rarely could. That never seemed like a wall between her and Steve, but more like a wall between her and the girls that Steve liked. At this point she was happy to have him in whatever capacity she was allowed. She'd stop dreaming of a relationship with Steve a long time ago and started being grateful for what she had. Now here he was telling her he was *in love*.

"The ballots are in!" a teacher proclaimed as the music cut off, and a spotlight focused on the stage where the teacher stood. She turned to look at the teacher as an automatic reflex, she hadn't completely come back to herself. When she turned away from Steve his heart sank. It plummeted from his chest as if leaping off the Empire State building.

"Our prom queen is..." the teacher drew out the anticipation as Y/N thought about the notebooks hidden in her room that all said Y/N Harrington in there somewhere multiple times.

"Y/N L/N," the teacher finished, to no one's surprise. People turned around and clapped, but she stood uncomprehendingly, thinking about her best friend, the messy haired kid on the playground who pushed her on the swings being in love with her.

"Y/N, no need to be shy come on up her," the teacher beckoned and she partially came back to herself, legs moving mechanically, bringing her to the stage, up the stairs and beside the teacher. Someone gave her flowers, she held them. Someone else gave her a crown and she smiled. She was blinded by the spotlight, but her eyes saw only Steve in every stage of his life leading up to this one moment.

"Our prom king...."

The prom king was standing trying to figure out how to joke his way out of this. How could he go back after making things so different. He kept thinking about the look on her face when said it, trying to decipher what it meant.

“Steve Harrington.”

He walked on stage and stood beside her. He kept his distance then she looked up at him, and everything was alright. There was fear in her eyes, yes, but also longing as if there were things she wanted to say, feelings to convey but no way to do it.

“Give it up for your prom king and queen.”

There were no words to say to tell Steve how long she had waited to hear those words. So she didn't use words. As the girls came up to put on their sashes she decided there was only one way to respond. One sure way that he would know the magnitude of what this meant. She shoved the roses into the arms of some girl, took Steve's face in her hands and pressed her lips to his as if it were the last thing she'd ever do. Steve never thought kissing his best friend would feel so right. Yet here he was, kissing her in front of everyone while they... clapped.

“Alright, you two, break it up,” the teacher spoke with a fond smile. Y/N moved away, and embarrassed smile on her face. She apologized to the girl who she so rudely shoved flowers to, then turned back to Steve. They stepped off the stage and outside where things were private.

“I've loved you my whole life,” she admitted as soon as they were outside. There were tears in her eyes as she laughed. The laughter came from the joy she felt, but also the bitter hilarity of her situation. She had given up hope of ever being with the love her life, she'd resigned herself to settling for someone who was nice enough, or adopting 16 cats.

“What?”

“I've loved you my whole damn life,” she repeated throwing her arms in the air then letting them fall down roughly, jostling the flowers in

her hand, "I just never thought you'd love me too."

"What?"

"Do I have to spell it out for you?" she snorted, "I thought you wouldn't love me, so I became alright with only being your friend."

"How... why?"

"I dunno. I mean, let's be fair Steve the girls you like look nothing like me."

He just kept looking at her like she was absolutely insane.

"Listen, nevermind. I just... yeah. Of course I love you. I've only been telling you that every day for your whole life."

"I thought you meant as a friend!"

"I just meant you. I meant all of you," she was still smiling, because after years of people teasing them about functioning like a married couple, here they were. She couldn't imagine them breaking up, or ever being without each other at this point. Steve was still dumbfounded, barely able to manage to blink. She grabbed him in a hug.

"I've loved you... my whole life," she mumbled against his chest.